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THE ACCESSIBILITY OF BUDDHIST LORE TO THE CHRISTIAN EVANGELISTS.

THE great difficulty in the way of Christian scholars accepting the fact of Buddhist elements in the Gospels is our ignorance of the extent of Buddhism at the time of Christ.

We imagine that before Luke and John could quote a Buddhist text they would have had to learn Sanskrit or Pali! But in view of recent discoveries no such wild fancy can any longer be. We now know from existing evidence that there were at the time of Christ the following sources of information about Buddhism accessible to the Evangelists:

1. Scenes in Buddha's life pictured in stone upon temples at Bharahat, Sâñci (probably), and Anurâdhapura. The first two remain to-day, while the list of life-scenes at the third is preserved in the *Great Chronicle* of Ceylon. As travelers were coming and going continually, some account of these sculptures was accessible to studious men in cities like Rome, Antioch and Alexandria.

2. Buddhist texts translated into Sogdian and Tokharish, two dialects understood by the Parthians who were present at Pentecost.¹

3. Lives of Buddha, manuals and elementary books on Buddhism known to have been translated into Chinese from

¹ See my article, "The Progress of Buddhist Research," in *Mahâ Bodhi Journal*, July, 1912.

the first century onward, and which it is reasonable to infer that the Buddhist missionaries had already translated into Tokharish and Sogdian, because the religion was in Bactria and probably in Parthia before it was in China.

4. Buddhist folk-tales which traveled orally or even in writing, and which were sculptured in abundance upon the temples already named. Hindu fairy tales have been traced by Jacobs in the Talmud, and one has lately been found scribbled upon an Egyptian vase of the first century.²

We are only following the methods of science followed by Adams and Leverrier as they watched for the planet Neptune, when we reason from the known to the unknown and infer that Matthew and Luke were using a Buddhist source in their story of the Lord's three temptations:

1. Temptation to assume empire,
2. Temptation to transmute matter,
3. Temptation to commit suicide.

I have shown in my article in *The Monist* for January, 1912,³ that our Gospels agree more closely with the Buddhist temptation story than with the Zoroastrian, though the latter was nearer, both geographically and theologically. In our present recensions of the Buddhist scriptures, in Pali and Chinese, these three temptations do not occur all together as in the Gospels, but two of them in a five-volume work and another in a three-volume work. This is the basis upon which Louis de la Vallée Poussin tells his clerical readers that I believe that Luke had the Classified and Long Collections (eight volumes) before him when framing his story of the Temptation!⁴ Many

² W. Max Müller, the Egyptologist, tells me this.

³ In reply to this article, Professor Garbe, in *The Monist* of July, 1912, p. 478, made the generous admission that I had heightened the probability of the loan hypothesis.

⁴ *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*: Kain, Belgium, 1912, (Article: "Les religions de l'Inde et l'Apologétique"). To complete the joke, La Vallée should have added that, in my belief, Luke was a subscriber to the Pali Text Society of Alexandria.

an ecclesiastic has doubtless enjoyed a laugh over this, as indeed I have enjoyed it myself. But in order to avoid this very hypothesis I had pointed out, in an article in *The Open Court* for January, 1912, that there were at the time of Christ numerous lives of Buddha, manuals and elementary treatises on Buddhism. We know this from Chinese catalogues of Buddhist literature which represent the Hindu, Bactrian and Parthian Buddhist books of the first century.

Moreover, there were numerous recensions of the Scriptures including the Book of Temptations. Eighteen sects, says the *Island Chronicle* of Ceylon, had each its own recension of the canon and swore that it was the right one. Now it is a very simple inference from known facts about the diversified arrangement of Buddhist texts, that there was at the time of Christ a recension of the Book of Temptations wherein all three temptations occurred together. It is practically certain that such was the case, for in the Suicide Temptation (late in Buddha's life) the Decease Book indicates that the same temptation had been made before, and that Buddha had given the Devil the same reply. In our present recensions of the Book of Temptations, in Pali and Chinese, this earlier suicide temptation is lacking.

In my *Monist* article, I adduced the angelic heralds and their hymn in Luke ii as a probable Buddhist loan. I should now like to add that the crucial words "For weal and welfare in the world of men" (Luke's well-known Christmas peace and good-will) were sculptured in substance upon the Girnâr Rock in the third century before Christ:

"The White Elephant who is called Bringer of Happiness to all the world!"

Christ was symbolized as a white and gentle lamb, and Buddha was symbolized as a white and gentle elephant.

He antedated Christ by several centuries as the first conception of a world-Messiah (unless our Mazdean friends can prove that Zoroaster was so conceived).

Besides Asoka's inscription at Girnâr, we have lately found one by Kanishka at Peshawar, wherein the words occur :

"Let it be for the weal and welfare and benefit of all beings!"

Among the scenes which were favorites to be sculptured upon topes, none was more prominent than the legend of Prince Workman-quarter, known in Pali as the *Vessantara Jâtaka*. According to this widespread folk-tale, the Buddha, in a former incarnation, was born in the workman's quarter of a capital and grew up to be a great philanthropist. He gave all he had away, including a magic rain-bringing elephant, and for this crime against the state he was banished. At last he gave even wife and children away, but, like Job, was restored to his former happiness.

Now this very story, which is at Bharahat, Sâñci, Ajantâ, Amarâvati, and has lately been found by Aurel Stein at Miran in Chinese Turkestan, was also graven upon the Anurâdhapura tope; and visitors from Alexandria came to the opening ceremonies in the second century before Christ. To crown all, the desert sands have just now yielded up a copy of the story in Sogdian, so that there was no excuse for an Antioch physician or an Ephesian Philonist, who were well versed in religious lore, to be ignorant of it. Sogdian was probably meant by Strabo when he said that nearly the same language pervaded Media and parts of Persia, Bactria and Sogdiana. And students of religion must have known about the great faith whose books were being translated by missionaries into the tongues of a neighboring empire.

I will end by translating from the Pali (*Jâtaka* 547 and

last) the vow of the former Buddha to sacrifice himself for mankind:

“When I was a child but eight years old,
Then, lying in my palace, I thought thus
upon gifts and giving:
My heart would I give, mine eye,
my flesh or my blood;
I would press out my body and give it
if any one should ask me!”

In the Sogdian version, just translated into French by Gauthiot, the vow is much nearer to Christian ideas; and it belongs to the research of the future to determine whether the story was rewritten under Nestorian influence in Central Asia, or whether these Mahâyâna ideas were not already developed by the time of Christ.

The Sogdian vow runs thus:

“May I obtain the quality of a Buddha; may I deliver from hell the living beings of the five forms of existence in the three worlds; may I disenthral them from evil; may I fasten the gates of hell; extricate from sufferings the living beings guilty of crimes and lead them to salvation (*Mokshanirvâna*) by the same way that the other Buddhas followed!”

Observe that the term for⁵ *salvation* is not in Sogdian, but in Sanskrit. This is because religious terms are often untranslated, like *presbyter*, *bishop*, *church*, and other Greek Testament words which have become naturalized in the languages of Christendom.

The use of Sanskrit instead of Pali need not indicate a late date for the Sogdian version, for we are told by the Tibetans that the recension of the Hinayâna scriptures of the Sarvâstivâdin school was in Sanskrit. And a fragment of Vinaya found in Tokharish, a neighboring dialect, is in the Sarvâstivâdin form.

⁵ *Journal Asiatique*, janvier-février, 1912, p. 184. Frequently repeated throughout the Jâtaka.

In spite of all the lost literature of the first and second centuries, we have enough fragments left that indicate Hindu and Parthian⁶ literary influence.

The magical books of Scythianus, the Parthian Book of Elkesai, the Hindu folk-tales in the Talmud aforesaid, and other obscurer traces collected in the Historical Introduction to *Buddhist and Christian Gospels*, are enough to satisfy any philosopher who understands how to take account of the unknown.⁷

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⁶ In the Parthian Empire Buddhism was mixed with Mazdeism.

⁷ See Darwin's "Imperfection of the Record," in his *Origin of Species*, with my remarks thereon in *Buddhist Texts in John*. In the latter also is a complete list of the sculptured scenes at Anurâdhapura.